

## *The Anatomy of Loving*



Rembrandt, *Adam and Eve*, 1638.

*Martin S. Bergmann*

# THE ANATOMY OF LOVING

*The Story of Man's Quest to Know What Love Is*

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*To Ridi for Our 40th Anniversary*

*I remember thee, the grace of thy youth,  
The love of thine espousals, when thou  
Wentest after me in the wilderness,  
In a land that was not sown.*

—Jeremiah 2:2



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# *Preface*

O, learn to read what silent love hath writ:  
To hear with eyes belongs to love's fine wit.  
—Shakespeare, Sonnet 23

O love is the crooked thing,  
There is nobody wise enough  
To find out all that is in it  
For he would be thinking of love  
Till the stars had run away  
And the shadows eaten the moon.  
—from Yeats' "Brown Penny"

**T**his book tells the story of man's quest to know what love is. To do justice to this project I had to roam over many domains guarded by specialists. Should this book be read by Egyptologists, classical scholars, Biblical or Shakespearean scholars, historians or philosophers, I hope they will agree that when I raided their respective domains I did so only when the perspective from which I was writing enabled me to say something original. To the general reader interested in love who wants to know what he is getting himself into before he plunges into the book, I suggest he read my last chapter first and see if he wishes to traverse the territory I stake out.

There is no shortage of new books coming off the press on the subject of love. The unprecedented "sexual revolution" is behind us, at least in the Western world, and there are signs that even the rigidities of Communism will be incapable of holding back the impact of this kind of revolution. We have become franker and more knowledgeable about all aspects of sex, and feel entitled to sexual happiness. But after sexual freedom came the

sense of emptiness that accompanies even satisfactory sexual relationships when the mysterious ingredient called love is missing. There is a further reason for a growing new curiosity about love: ours has been called the age of narcissism, and narcissism, as psychoanalysts have discovered, stands in a complex relationship to loving. Most authors are unaware of this connection, but my book deals extensively with the history and psychology of narcissism.

One particular insight forced itself upon me in the course of this study: on the surface, love strikes us as a unitary emotion—all those who love share in this emotion, but if love is examined in depth one discovers different types of love. Some lovers fall into one or another clear-cut group, which I have delineated in the last chapter; others show in their love an amalgam of different kinds of love. The inner development of a person before he or she falls in love determines the way he or she will love and the course love will take.

Many books on love that I have read have quoted Cherubino's famous aria in Mozart's *Figaro* ("Voi che sapete che cosa e amor": "Tell us you who know if this be love"). Hagstrum (1980) noted that the question, *what is love*, is raised by the adolescent, whose gender identity is still in flux, a mixture of Narcissus and Adonis. The more ambiguous the sense of gender identity, the more puzzling will love appear. It seems to me that it was no accident that the Greeks, who repressed their homosexuality less than others, were also the first to experience love as a puzzle. We owe to the Greek and Roman philosophers and poets not only the first insights into the nature of love but some of the most profound observations made on the subject before Freud. I found that Freud's ideas on love can be understood better if we put them within the framework of Western thought going back to ancient Greece and the Bible. In my view, psychoanalysis owes much more to its humanist past than Freud and other psychoanalysts have acknowledged. At the same time, psychoanalysis has thrown new light on this humanist past.

The literary critic Harold Bloom has said of Freud that "His agon with the whole of anteriority is the largest and most intense of our century." (The term anteriority was coined by Bloom as the opposite of posteriority, that is, the struggle of every creative thinker against the oppression exercised by tradition.) He goes on to state that Freud usurped the role of the mind in our age, so that more than forty years after his death we have no common vocabulary for discussion of works of the spirit except what he gave us. My book confirms Bloom's prediction, for when I wanted to tell the story of man's quest to understand love I could see the past only

through Freud's prism. As to Freud's own wrestling with the past, I find Plato to be Freud's main agon, that is, the person Freud is most influenced by and whose influence he is struggling against. The only other "agon" of a similar nature was Nietzsche.

Because I believe that there is an unconscious continuity that links myths, legends, and theories of philosophers of the classical past to dreams and neuroses of modern men and women, I have throughout the book juxtaposed classical texts with associations of analysts.

I feel confident that this book will be read by those who value psychoanalysis, whether for personal or professional reasons, including mental health professionals who need to understand as comprehensively as possible the psychoanalytic contribution to love. They will read this book to be more effective in their clinical work. It is my hope that I have also written a book of wider appeal—that has something important and new to say to those who cherish our humanist past, who find it relevant, and who wish to know how psychoanalysis fits into this long tradition.

Finally, I wish to say something to those who will read the book because they are bewildered about the outcome of their efforts to find happiness in love. One of the earliest metaphors on love compares it to a sickness that only the beloved can cure. Books have no such power. But should it happen that an understanding of our culture's long struggle to understand love, or the views of a particular author cited, or even a case presented enables a reader to see his or her difficulties in another, more helpful and hopeful light, even though the book has no curative intent, it would be a gain not only to the reader but to myself.

I am indebted to many analysts, students, and colleagues for their helpful ideas. Unfortunately, not all of them can be mentioned. Professor Peter Gay read the first version of this book. In his reading he combined the diligence of an editor with the erudition of one familiar with the literature on love. I am equally indebted to Dr. Otto Kernberg, who has contributed so much to the expansion of the analytic knowledge of this field and who read the first version and made valuable suggestions. I have profited greatly from the remarks of Dr. Arlene Richards and Mrs. Anne Rose, who also read the manuscript. My wife and my son Michael were helpful collaborators. Professor Bernard Bothmer and Mr. Lee Pomerantz gave me access to Sumerian and Egyptian sources not easily available to the layman. Dr. Giorgio DiGregorio discussed at length with me the complex chapter on Freud. Some portions of this book were written in Oxford, and the staff of the Bodleian Library were most helpful in locating many source books. I also was heartened that my two assistants, Mrs. Andrea

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Madden and Miss Martha Meade, were not only skillful in the use of the word processor, but showed a lively interest in the book's content. Any writer knows the pain that the blank face of a secretary can inflict. I was spared this agony. I would like to thank Mrs. Barbara Frank for proof-reading.

I began writing this book about twenty years ago. My first paper on love appeared in 1971. Preliminary versions of some of the chapters appeared in *The Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, the *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, the *International Journal of Psycho-Analytic Psycho-Therapy*, and the *American Imago*. I thank the editors of these journals for permission to reprint sections of these papers.

I also want to thank the Postgraduate Center for Psychotherapy for giving me the privilege of "a year's distinguished psychoanalyst" to present this book in a series of lectures. The book profited from the question and answer periods.



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*The Humanist Past*  
*The Growth of the*  
*Vocabulary of Love*



# 1

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## *Love Poetry in Ancient Egypt*

Poetry is the plow that turns up time  
so that the deep layers of time, the  
black soil, appear on top.

—Ossip Mandelstam in Gibbons 1979: 18

Most writers on love quote with approval La Rochefoucauld's statement to the effect that most people would not love if they did not hear love talked about. La Rochefoucauld was one of the inventors of the maxim as a literary form, but in this case he raised a crucial question which can be paraphrased: Is love essentially a social phenomenon cultivated in certain climates of opinion and not found in others? Or does it represent a basic human need and is it ubiquitous wherever human beings are found? The search for clarification of this question led me to ask when love was discovered. The search led to the new kingdom of Egypt (1300 to 1000 B.C.), where we find the first poetry of love.

### *Egyptian Love Poetry*

A prerequisite for a self-conscious love poetry is possession of the word love in the language. The Egyptians had a hieroglyph for love, both as a noun and as a verb. It consisted of three parts: a hoe, a mouth, and the figure of a man with a hand in his mouth.\*

Egyptian love poetry (Lichtheim 1976; Simpson 1973) was written on

\*I wish to express my thanks to Dr. Howard H. Schlossman for drawing my attention to this fascinating hieroglyph.

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papyri and vases between 1300 and 1100 B.C.. It comes from the new kingdom in Egypt. They are old by our standards but late by Egyptian standards since Egyptian recorded history begins in 3000 B.C. Papyri and clay are not as enduring as writing in stone. It is therefore possible that love poetry existed earlier, but it did not survive. Fifty-five love poems have been assembled by Egyptologists, all dating from the new kingdom. When we come upon the Egyptian love poems after familiarity with other love poetry, they astonish us by the range of topics and the subtlety of the emotions they express. What is most striking in these poems is the absence of painful associations such as shame, guilt, or ambivalence that will characterize much of the later love poetry. A reader acquainted with the biblical Song of Songs will find that many of the metaphors are familiar.

A woman speaks: My brother torments my heart with his voice,  
He makes sickness take hold of me;  
He is neighbor to my mother's house,  
And I cannot go to him!  
Mother is right in charging him thus:  
"Give up seeing him!"  
It pains my heart to think of him,  
I am possessed by love of him.

A man speaks: Seven days since I saw my sister,  
And sickness invaded me;  
I am heavy in all my limbs,  
My body has forsaken me.  
When the physicians come to me,  
My heart rejects their remedies;  
The magicians are quite helpless,  
My sickness is not discerned.  
To tell me "She is here" would revive me!  
The sight of her makes me well!  
When she opens her eyes my body is young,  
Her speaking makes me strong;  
Embracing her expels my malady—  
Seven days since she went from me!

(Lichtheim 1976:182–185)

The metaphor of love as a form of sickness is also found in the Song of Songs. "Stay with me flagons, comfort me with apples: for I am sick of love" (2:5).

The only jarring note to our ears is the universal address of sister when



the man is speaking and brother when the voice is a woman's. These were normal terms of endearment in ancient Egyptian usage (Lichtheim 1976:181). Unlike the Egyptians, whose pharaohs were privileged to transgress the incest taboo and marry their sisters, we are sensitive to the association between sibling and beloved. Antiquity in general was not so strict in separating sibling love from sexual love. In the Song of Songs, which is of Hellenistic origin (Rozelaar 1954; Hadas 1959), we find: "Thou hast ravaged my heart, my sister, my spouse"; and "How fair is thy love, my sister, my spouse" (4:9 and 10). Since love is experienced as an overwhelming emotion beyond the control of the healthy ego, the metaphor of sickness is apt.

And now some fragments expressing the bliss of love:

I found my lover on his bed,  
and my heart was sweet to excess.  
I shall never be far away (from) you  
while my hand is in your hand,  
and I shall stroll with you  
in every favorite place.

How pleasant is this hour,  
may it extend for me to eternity;  
since I have lain with you  
you have lifted high my heart.  
In mourning or in rejoicing  
be not far from me.

(Simpson 1973:308)

The ambivalence that lovers feel toward being caught in love found expression in Egypt in the metaphor of the trap. The metaphor was readily available in a culture that derived part of its sustenance from trapping wild fowl. A woman speaks:

The voice of the wild goose shrills,  
It is caught by its bait;  
My love of you pervades me,  
I cannot loosen it.  
I shall retrieve my nets,  
But what do I tell my mother.  
To whom I go daily,  
Laden with bird catch?  
I have spread no snares today,  
I am caught in my love of you!

(Lichtheim 1976:190)

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There is humor in the metaphor of the layer of traps becoming herself entrapped. The woman employs the metaphor of the trapped wild fowl and the man humorously uses a metaphor of domesticated cattle to describe his "plight":

How well she knows to cast the noose,  
And yet not pay the cattle tax!  
She casts the noose on me with her hair,  
She captures me with her eye;  
She curbs me with her necklace,  
She brands me with her seal ring.

(Lichtheim, p. 187)

Some poems are addressed to the lover's own heart. They suggest that love was already experienced as an intrapsychic event, symbolized by a metaphorical use of the heart.

My heart flutters hastily,  
When I think of my love of you;  
It lets me not act sensibly,

(Lichtheim, p. 183)

"Don't wait, go there," says it to me,  
As often as I think of him;  
My heart, don't act so stupidly,  
Why do you play the fool?

(Lichtheim, p. 184)

The Egyptians experienced the heart as an intrapsychic structure standing apart from the rest of the personality. In this poem, the heart is accused of being the organ of love. The equation of heart with love has remained with us; we say we lose our hearts when we fall in love.

There are hints of masochism and perhaps also fetishism in some of the Egyptian poems.

I wish I were her Negro maid  
who follows at her feet;  
then the skin of all her limbs  
would be (revealed) to me.  
I wish I were her washerman,  
if only for a single month,  
then I would be (entranced),\*

\*Parentheses indicate breaks in the tablets.

washing out the Moringa oils  
in her diaphanous garments . . .

I wish I were the seal ring,  
the guardian of her (fingers),  
then ( . . . )

(Simpson 1973:311)

Nature is alive and participates in love making. Trees compete with each other by offering hiding places for lovers but they can also become jealous when they discover that the lovers take them for granted. First the sycamore is speaking.

The little sycamore,  
which she planted with her hand,  
sends forth its words to speak . . .

Come spend the day happily,  
tomorrow and the day after tomorrow, for three days,  
seated in my shade,

Her friend is on her right.  
She gets him drunk  
while doing what he says;  
and the wine cellar is disordered in drunkenness,  
as she stays with her lover.

She has ample room beneath me,  
the lady love as she paces;

I am discreet  
and will not say that I have seen their discourse.

(Simpson, pp. 314-315)

The new kingdom was a splendid age in Egyptian history. The invading Hyksos had been expelled and Egypt became a world power with frontiers extending to the Euphrates. In this era the religious revolution of Akhnaton took place, which in Freud's view prefigured the figure of Moses and the Israeli exodus out of Egypt. The Egyptians of the new kingdom already had behind them the splendid pyramid age. When that age collapsed, it was followed by an age of disillusionment and pessimism. During the new kingdom, Egyptians were occupied with the ideas of judgment beyond the grave. The burial graves of Memphis depict him standing in judgment before Osiris, his earthly behavior being weighed. On one side of the scale, Maat, the goddess of truth, is crouching. On the other, the heart of the deceased is balanced. Should he fail to pass the test, a crocodile stands ready to consume his heart. Spells, written on the walls of the grave, make

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sure that this will not happen. A special spell enjoins the heart from testifying against the deceased.

The *Book of the Dead* contains a fascinating chapter on the so-called negative confessions, when the deceased declares what he has not done. There we find such statements as "I have not taken milk from the mouths of children. I have not falsified the scales, I have not caught fishes in the marshes of the gods." Some negative confessions deal with strictly ethical issues such as "I have not defamed a slave to his superior." Others deal with sexual relationships such as "I have not had sexual relations with a boy" (Pritchard 1969:34). These negative confessions tell us a great deal about the temptations against which the ancient Egyptians had to struggle.

Love poetry makes its appearance in a complex society, where feelings of guilt were already highly developed and techniques to combat them well established. Homosexuality and particularly the seduction of boys must have been prevalent or they would not appear in the "negative confessions."

What is striking in these poems is the wealth of metaphors. There is something in the nature of love that is conducive to metaphor formation. The emotion is intense but words fail the lovers, and their language passes into metaphor. Surprisingly, most of the Egyptian poems on love are secular in nature. The Egyptian lovers do not experience their love as the working of any god, although they ask the golden goddess to be united with their lovers and to have their love reciprocated. Nor do the Egyptian lovers know the pain of ambivalence, loving and hating at the same time. There are only mild indications of intrapsychic conflict; basically the lovers are in harmony with their feelings of love. No love seems illicit. There is no struggle between love and obedience to parents. The lovers are not tormented by feelings of guilt or inadequacy. They do not feel that they may not deserve the love they desire. A heavy burden of guilt hovers over the new kingdom in Egypt but it finds no reflection in the Egyptian love poetry.

In ancient Egypt lover-poets invented the metaphorical language we still use. The existence of love poetry 3,500 years ago in a culture that played only a peripheral role in the Western world, I take as evidence in support of the hypothesis that love is not a habit fostered in certain cultures. To make a jump to the nineteenth century, Madame Bovary's desperate search for lovers was undoubtedly influenced by her reading of romances. But the lessons I draw from Flaubert's masterpiece is not that reading evokes the hunger for love, but that reading novels evoked in Madame Bovary fantasies of love that she was unable to translate into her real world and this inability to transfer the fantasies into reality led to her undoing.

Whether preliterate primitive societies know love songs is a matter of controversy. Bowra (1962), who studied primitive song, is of the opinion that societies that live on hunting and gathering have no love songs. These appear only after a settled agricultural life has replaced hunting and nomadic existence. Bowra (p. 175) reports that the aborigines of Arnheim land associate lovemaking with the monsoons. They identify flashes of lightning with the mating of snakes. In their view, the tongues of lightning are snakes flickering and twisting, one with the other. To my knowledge, no poet has ever used lightning as a sexual symbol. And yet, in association with the violence of the monsoon, this metaphor rings true. If the aborigines of Arnheim had no love songs, they did at least know how to use similes and metaphors, which are the basic prerequisites for poetry.

Bowra was a classical scholar by training. In contrast to his view, the anthropologist Paul Radin (1957) collected a number of love poems current among aborigines.

As the rapid flow of the current at Onoiau,  
And as the swollen torrent from the valley,  
So flows my yearning heart after thee,  
O Aitofa, have compassion on thy lover, lest he die!

As a great cloud obscuring the sky is his grief,  
The grief of the husband mourning for his estranged wife,  
And like the sky darkened by its rising is my distress for her.  
(Tonga, Polynesia)

I would drown myself if you died,  
Drown myself in the river Si Tumallam,  
If you were thrust into the depths,  
Into the deep abyss  
That we cannot ascend.  
I shall endeavor  
To make a twisted cord—  
The road to death.

(Batak, Sumatra)

And a lullaby illustrating the love between parent and child.

Why dost thou weep, my child?  
The sky is bright; the sun is shining;  
Why dost thou weep?  
Go to thy father; he loves thee,  
Go tell him why thou weepest.  
What! Thou weepest still?

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Thy father loves thee, I caress thee:  
Yet still thou art sad.  
Tell me, then, my child, why dost thou weep!  
(Balengi, Central Africa)

Finally, they seem to know that love is not always bliss:

Love does not torment forever.  
It came on me like the fire  
Which rages sometimes at Hukanui.  
If this beloved one is near to me,  
Do not suppose, O Kiri, that my sleep is sweet.  
I lie awake the livelong night,  
For love to prey on me in secret.  
(Maori, New Zealand)

## 2

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### *Sensuous Poetry in Ancient Sumer*

**T**he Sumerian and Babylonian epic of Gilgamesh goes back to 2000 B.C. It may well be the oldest literary work to have come down to us. When the epic of Gilgamesh was written, Sumer already had a long history. Its myths were established and it had a well-ordered pantheon of divinities. Gilgamesh was a powerful and ruthless king.\* To curb his power, the gods created out of clay Enkidu, his double. We encounter here for the first time an ancient group of ideas associated with love. We will deal with them again when we analyze Plato's *Symposium*. The general mythological assumption is that long ago man was very powerful, as he was also self-satisfied, needed nobody, and did not know love. This state, which following Freud can be called the state of gratified narcissism, becomes the prerogative of the gods as religion develops. Once this wish has been projected on them, the gods are seen as begrudging this gratified narcissism to men. They therefore split him in two, and thus create longing, a characteristic of mortals but unknown to gods.

In the Gilgamesh epic, the fact that love between friends is the result of divine splits is only implied. After a short combat, Gilgamesh and Enkidu become friends for life and it is the death of Enkidu that brings about a profound change in Gilgamesh. From the ordinary hero of antiquity who is ever eager for combat with monsters, he becomes the seeker of immortality which he almost finds only to lose it again. Unlike the Egyptians, who saw the hereafter as a continuation of life and erected pyramids to make sure that the dead king would have all his needs met in the netherworld, the Assyrians had a desolate view of the world to come and their epics

\*For a fuller account of the Gilgamesh myth written for the general reader, see G. S. Kirk 1970, chapter 4.

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expressed openly the fear of death. In this book I will be concerned primarily with the problems of love in Sumerian mythology and literature.

Enkidu is at first a subhuman demonic being.

With the gazelles he feeds on grass,  
With the wild beasts he jostles at the watering place,  
With the teeming creatures his heart delights in water.  
(Speiser 1969:74)

As the champion of the animals, Enkidu terrorizes the hunters. He fills the pits they have set for the animals and tears up their traps. The hunter consults his father, who devises a way of taming Enkidu.

Go my hunter, take with thee a harlot-lass.  
When he waters the beasts at the watering-place,  
She shall pull off her clothing, laying bare her ripeness.  
As soon as he sees her, he will draw near to her.  
Reject him will his beasts that grew up on his steppe!\*

(p. 75)

The harlot-lass is a sacred prostitute. The hunter cheers her on during the crucial moment.

“There he is, O lass! Free thy breasts,  
Bare thy bosom that he may possess thy ripeness!  
Be not bashful! Welcome his ardor!  
As soon as he sees thee, he will draw near to thee.  
Treat him, the savage, to a woman’s task!  
Reject him will his wild beasts that grew up on his  
steppe,  
As his love is drawn unto thee.”

\*That metaphors can remain alive over thousands of years can be seen when *Gilgamesh* is juxtaposed to the poem “Man” (*Der Mensch*) by the German Romantic poet, Holderlin. The translation is by Michael Hamburger:

Soon he has grown up;  
The animals avoid him, for other than  
They is man; he does not resemble  
Thee, nor the Father, for boldly in him  
And alone are mingled the Father’s lofty  
Spirit with thy joy, O Earth, and thy sorrow.  
Gladly he would be like the mother  
Of the gods, like all-embracing Nature!  
For more freely breathe the birds of the forest,  
And though Man’s breast rises with greater splendour,  
And he sees the dark future, he must  
See death too, and he alone must fear it.



For six days and seven nights Enkidu comes forth,  
Mating with the lass.  
After he had had (his) fill of her charms,  
He set his face toward his wild beasts.  
On seeing him, Enkidu, the gazelles ran off,  
The wild beasts of the steppe drew away from his body.  
Startled was Enkidu, as his body became taut,  
His knees were motionless—for his wild beasts had gone.  
Enkidu had to slacken his pace—it was not as before;

(p. 75)

The choice of the term “ripeness” to describe a woman’s body brings Rubens or Renoir to mind. Carnal knowledge estranges man from nature. For Gilgamesh and for Adam in Genesis, sexual knowledge is the end of innocence.

She pulled off (her) clothing;  
With one (piece) she clothed him,  
With the other garment  
She clothed herself.  
Holding on to his hand,  
She leads him like a child  
To the shepherd-hut,

(p. 77)

Symbolically, Enkidu is weaned away from the “milk of wild creatures.” Although Enkidu lost his wildness, he had gained understanding. The lass comforts him.

“Thou art wise, Enkidu, art become like a god!  
Why with the wild creatures dost thou roam over the  
steppes?”

(p. 75)

The Bible too speaks of Adam knowing Eve. Enkidu has become civilized and wise through the sexual act. We should note also that in spite of the prominence given to the sexual encounter this is not yet a love poem.

In the meantime Gilgamesh has a dream anticipating Enkidu’s arrival. In the dream he was vanquished by Enkidu, and his mother interprets the dream:

(Like the essence of Anu),\* so mighty his strength  
(That thou didst love him and) wert (drawn) to him  
(as though to a woman),

\*Parentheses indicated breaks in the tablets.

(Means that he will never) forsake (th)ee.  
(This is the mean)ing of thy dream.”

(p. 76)

It is evident that the ancients used dreams as a supportive rather than an analytic therapy. To a psychoanalyst, the wisdom of Enkidu's mother is truly astonishing; it will take another four thousand years for Freud to discover that the homosexual falls in love with the man who has defeated him. When the boy sees no prospects of equaling or defeating his father, or the daughter of a beautiful woman cannot see herself capable of equaling or defeating the mother, Freud will discover that aforementioned rivalry turns into love. Gilgamesh's mother, like many mothers of homosexuals today, encourages the shift towards homosexuality because Enkidu is less of a threat than another woman.

The epic of *Gilgamesh* contains another episode of special significance. At one point the goddess Ishtar falls in love with Gilgamesh. This is what she promises him:

“Come, Gilgamesh, be thou (my) lover!  
Do but grant me of thy fruit.  
Thou shalt be my husband and I will be thy wife.  
I will harness for thee a chariot of lapis and gold,  
Whose wheels are gold and whose horns are brass.  
Thou shalt have storm-demons to hitch on for mighty mules.  
In the fragrance of cedars thou shalt enter our house.  
When our house thou enterest,  
Threshold (and) dais shall kiss thy feet!  
Humbled before thee shall be kings, lords, and princes!  
The yield of hills and plain they shall bring thee as  
tribute.  
Thy goats shall cast triplets, thy sheep twins,  
Thy he-ass in lading shall surpass thy mule.  
Thy chariot horses shall be famed for racing,  
(Thine Ox) under yoke shall not have a rival!”

(pp. 83–84)

But Gilgamesh is not seduced by the goddess's offer of wealth, for he knows her history. Ishtar is the archetype of the beautiful woman who brings disaster to men. Gilgamesh recounts her history to her face.

“For Tammus, the lover of thy youth,  
Thou hast ordained wailing year after year.  
Having loved the dappled shepherd-bird,  
Thou smotest him, breaking his wing.

In the grooves he sits, crying 'My wing!'  
Then thou lovedst a lion, perfect in strength;  
Seven pits and seven thou didst dig for him.  
Then a stallion thou lovedst, famed in battle;  
The whip, the spur, and the lash thou ordained for him  
Thou decreedst for him to gallop seven leagues;

. . . .

Then thou lovedst Ishullanu, thy father's gardener,  
Who baskets of dates ever did bring to thee,  
And daily did brighten thy table.  
Thine eyes raised at him, thou didst go to him:  
'O my Ishullanu, let us taste of thy vigor!  
Put forth thy "hand" and touch our "modesty!"'  
Ishullanu said to thee;  
'What dost thou want with me?  
Has my mother not baked, have I not eaten,  
That I should taste the food of stench and foulness?  
Does reed-work afford cover against the cold?'  
As thou didst hear this (his talk),  
Thou smotest him and turnedst him into a mole."

(p. 84)

Such a courageous defiance of a goddess we will meet again in the *Iliad* when Helen defies Aphrodite. Such a defiance is unthinkable under monotheistic conditions, but it was thinkable when the relationship between gods and mortals could become a sexual one. Astarte had the same evil intentions that Circe entertained towards Odysseus and his crew. In the Greek myth, however, Odysseus overcomes Circe's magic and can enjoy her sexually. He does so with the aid of a powerful male god, Hermes.

Neither Gilgamesh nor his double Enkidu discover heterosexual love. The epos tallies well with some of Freud's findings, namely that fear of woman and her destructive and castrative power may be older and precede man's capacity to love her. The love for the double, narcissistic love in psychoanalytic language, may be older than heterosexual love.

Gilgamesh, married to the goddess of fertility, also acquires the right of the first night.

The drum of the people is free  
For nuptial choice, that with lawful wives he might mate!  
He is the first the husband comes after.

Freud (1918) explained the medieval “right to the first night”—in Latin “*Jus prima noctis*”—as a custom that symbolically gave the father the right to the daughters but it also served the function of deflecting the hostility of the woman toward her deflowerer from the husband to the king father. This custom was already established early in the history of civilization.

The noted Assyrian scholar, Samuel Noah Kramer, was examining Assyrian tablets when he made a discovery which he later reported in a book.

As I read it again and yet again, there was no mistaking its content. What I held in my hand was one of the oldest love songs written down by the hand of man.

It soon became clear that this was not a secular poem, not a song of love between just ‘a man and a maid.’ It involved a king and his selected bride, and was no doubt intended to be recited in the course of the most hallowed of ancient rites, the rite of the ‘sacred marriage.’ Once a year, according to Sumerian belief, it was the sacred duty of the ruler to marry a priestess and votary of Inanna, the goddess of love and procreation, in order to ensure fertility to the soil and fecundity to the womb. The time-honored ceremony was celebrated on New Year’s day and was preceded by feast and banquets accompanied by music, song, and dance. (Kramer 1969)

Our interest in love poetry goes in the opposite direction, for we are in search of the first description of sexual love. Even as a ritualistic love song, however, the poem Kramer discovered is of interest.

Bridegroom, dear to my heart,  
 Goodly is your beauty, honeysweet,  
 Lion, dear to my heart,  
 Goodly is your beauty honeysweet.  
 You have captivated me, let me stand tremblingly before  
                   you,  
 Bridegroom, I would be taken by you to the bedchamber,  
 You have captivated me, let me stand tremblingly before  
                   you,  
 Lion, I would be taken by you to the bedchamber.  
 Bridegroom, let me caress you,  
 My precious caress is more savory than honey,  
 In the bedchamber, honey filled,  
 . . . My precious caress is more savory than honey.  
 Bridegroom, you have taken your pleasure of me,  
 Tell my mother, she will give you delicacies,  
 My father, he will give you gifts.  
 Your spirit, I know where to cheer your spirit,  
 Bridegroom, sleep in our house until dawn,

(pp. 212–214)

Another fragment from a poem written for the same purpose reads:

My god, of the wine-maid, sweet is her drink,  
Like her drink sweet is her vulva sweet, is her drink,  
Like her lips sweet is her vulva, sweet is her drink,  
Sweet is her mixed drink, her drink.

(p. 215)

I am led to a different interpretation of the songs. What Kramer discovered was a poem of transition between fertility hymns and poetry of love. The context is still within the religious ritual. Sexual intercourse has to take place with the priestess if the harvest is to succeed. But the language is already the language of erotic seduction. The equation of love and wine is also found in the Song of Songs: "how much better is thy love than wine! and the smell of thine ointments than all spices!" "Thy lips, O my spouse, drop as the honey-comb: honey and milk are under thy tongue" (4:10 and 11).

In early love poetry it is important that the beloved be accepted by the parents, particularly the mother. We find this also in the Song of Songs: "I held him, and would not let him go, until I had bought him into my mother's house, and into the chamber of her that conceived me" (3:4).

From a psychoanalytic point of view we can read these lines as expressing in symbolic language a wish that the beloved become a twin from whom no separation will have to take place.

Unusual in poetry is the direct reference to the female genital. Most writers have preferred a metaphorical reference. Shulamith, in the Song of Songs, says: "My mother's children were angry with me; they made me the keeper of the vineyards, but my own vineyard have I not kept" (1:6). It would seem that the few seconds it takes to decipher the metaphor of the vineyard as referring to the vagina or the metaphor of "possessing her ripeness" as referring to sexual intercourse give the reader the chance to experience what Freud called a bonus of pleasure and undo some of the moral criticism that a franker sexual reference would evoke.

Istar, whom we encountered earlier, is the Semitic name for Inanna. Inanna was the dominant divinity of the Sumerians. She stands at the dawn of history between 3000 and 2000 B.C. As Friedrich (1978) has pointed out, she is a goddess of sexual desire, a desire devoid of maternity. She is already beginning to separate herself from goddesses of fertility. It is in Inanna that we discover for the first time man's fear of the insatiable sexuality of woman. She is both a martial goddess of war and a goddess of sexual desire.

The recently published *Inanna* hymns (Wolkstein and Kramer 1983) describe the story of the courtship between the shepherd king Dumuzi (the biblical Tammus) and Inanna, the goddess of heaven and earth. The hymn

opens with the sun god, Utto, promising his sister a wedding gift of flax. The coy goddess asks who will comb it for her. When Utto promises to comb it, she asks further, who will spin then braid, warp, weave, and finally bleach the wedding sheets. At every turn, the brother promises the next chore until the goddess asks the question we assume must have been on her mind all along: who will go to bed with her on the newly spun wedding sheets? At this point the Sumerian god stops short of incest and suggests that Dumuzi the shepherd will be her bridegroom. The choice of Dumuzi grew out of a competition. The farmer offers grain in great heaps, flax, clothes, and beer. The shepherd's gifts are milk, wool, and cheese. Victory goes to the shepherd.

Inanna consults her mother Ningal, who assures her that the bridegroom will be both father and mother to her. She tells Dumuzi that her vulva is full of eagerness like a young moon. While her untilled land lies fallow, she asks that her vulva be plowed. At these suggestions the shepherd king's lap stood up like the rising sea and Inanna asks for his thick sweet milk. He plants the sweet seed. His fullness is her delight. Their necks are pressed close to each other.

Sweet is the sleep hand to hand  
Sweeter still the sleep of heart to heart.

Before Inanna is ready for her nonincestuous lover, she must renounce her sexual wishes toward her brother and she needs the assurance of her mother that the lover will replace both parents. In this sense the hymn celebrates the transfer of what Freud calls the libido from incestuous love objects to a nonincestuous one.

Inanna spoke: I bathe for the wild bull  
I bathe for the shepherd Dumuzi  
I perfumed my sides with ointment  
I coated my mouth with sweet smelling amber  
I painted my eyes with kohl  
He shaped my loins with his fair hands  
The shepherd Dumuzi filled my lap with cream and milk  
He stroked my pubic hair . . .  
He laid his hands on my holy vulva

. . . .

My beloved the delight of my eyes met me  
We rejoiced together  
He took his pleasure of me  
He brought me into his house.

(Wolkstein and Kramer 1983:43-44, 48)

In keeping with the demands of the fertility cycle, the sweet love becomes sated. Dumuzi asks to be set free. Inanna descends to the nether world. In the accepted version of this myth, Astarte descends to the nether world in search of her murdered lover, Tammus. In the version of Wolkstein and Kramer, no motivation is given for Inanna's descent, for Dumuzi will be killed after her return to the world of the living. As Inanna descends to the nether world, she passes through seven gates, in which she is gradually stripped, first of her steppe crown, then of her necklace of lapis beads. She relinquishes all of her ornaments. Naked and bowed low, she reaches the world of the dead. At every gate, she asks, "What is this," and receives the same answer, "The ways of the underworld are perfect and they may not be questioned." While she is imprisoned in the nether world, there is desolation on earth: the bull refused to cover the cow, the ass did not approach the she-ass, in the streets the man no longer approached the maidservant. She is allowed to return by magic devices and the gods revive her. However, the demons of the underworld follow her. These demons cannot be appeased for they eat no offerings, they drink no libation, they accept no gifts, and enjoy no lovemaking. They tear the wife from the husband's arms, the child from the father's knee, and the bride from her marriage chamber. One cannot read those lines without being reminded of the medieval engravings of the dance of death where the artist also derived sadistic pleasure from showing how death approaches people in situations where nobody would expect him.

These demons demand that Inanna give them a substitute for her liberation. Various people close to her offer themselves, but Inanna cannot do without them. Finally they come upon Dumuzi. Inanna focuses upon him the eye of death. She cries out, "Take him," and the demons dismember Dumuzi with their axes.

The myth exists in two forms: In the lamentation myth, Tammus, Osiris, or Adonis are killed by wild animals or jealous competitors. In the other version of the myth, the one favored in Sumer, it is the goddess herself who kills her former lover. Annually their nuptials are celebrated, and annually Inanna's descent and Dumuzi's dismemberment are dramatized.

Probably under the influence of the image of Aphrodite, scholars call both Ishtar and Inanna goddesses of love. However, it seems to me that if we follow the record closely, it is more accurate to call them goddesses of procreation and sexual desire. Hymns to these goddesses are beautiful and sensuous but they do not reach the level of Egyptian love poetry nor do they show the interest that Aphrodite displays in the love affairs of mortals.

The evidence from Sumer allows us to reach some tentative conclusions about the emergence of love poetry. The sensual quality of these poems is

evident, but can they be called love poems? My answer is no; they are precursors to the secular poetry of love. In the poetry of love, it is the lover's own love that gives rise to verse and metaphor. The lover praises the beloved in the poetry of seduction, the lover aims to lower the resistance of the reluctant partner. The woman must praise her own capacities to gratify and delight the bridegroom.